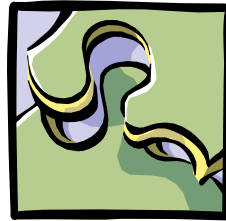


Training Module #5:



Enhancing Your Working Relationship With Your Boss

Introduction

This print module was produced by the Michigan Judicial Institute (MJl) specifically for Michigan Court Support Personnel.

The intent of this print module is to provide staff with information on the following topics:

- ❖ Encourage court staff to examine the work relationship they have with their boss.
- ❖ Recognize that as an employee they have the power to improve the relationship by taking positive action.
- ❖ Identify specific actions that foster a strong work relationship. The information is presented in a quick-read format and is intended to serve as a tool for learning, reflection, and dialogue.

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If you are interested in additional training related to this topic, please refer to:

- ❖ “*Fostering Effective Communication*” —MJl Print Module # 3

For inquiries on this or other available Michigan Judicial Institute training resources, contact MJl at (517) 373–7171.

**“The
most important contributor
to job satisfaction
is the quality of the
relationship
employees have
with their supervisors.”**

John Maxwell

You and Your Boss Are a Team

You and your boss are a team. As a team you share a mutual dependence—a need to work together effectively to obtain the best possible results for each of you as well as the organization you work for.

In order to work effectively, you need to have an understanding of your boss and his/her situation, as well as your own.

If you do not have this understanding, you are working in the dark and unnecessary challenges, conflicts, misunderstandings, and problems are inevitable and result in a work environment that causes stress and frustration.

By understanding your boss, you can build a collaborative relationship that allows your boss to be an advocate, a mentor, and a coach. By the same token, understanding yourself will assist you in developing and maintaining a working relationship that fits your needs and style.



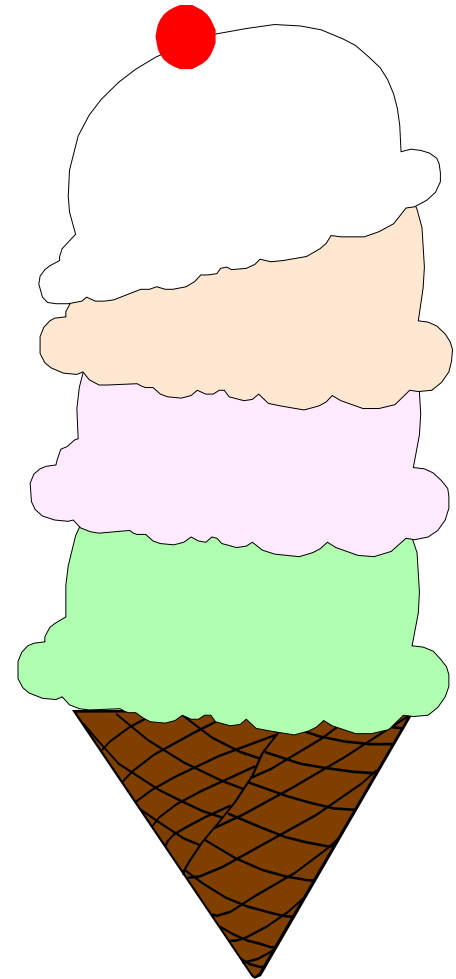
“Mr. Vandenburg will see right through you now.”

As Different as Ice Cream

We all have a personal style. Our style is reflected in our daily lives—at home and in the workplace. It is part of who we are, how we interact with people, how we deal with each part of our daily living.

Our styles are like different flavors of ice cream—some of us are as plain as vanilla and others of us have some interesting things mixed in to provide uniqueness and variety. And you know what? That's okay! It would be a pretty boring world if we were all “vanillas”.

However, this uniqueness and variety provides challenges as well.



Understanding Your Own Style

Remember the boss is only half of the relationship.
YOU are the other half—the half over which you have control.

You are not going to change either your own basic personality or that of your boss. You can, however, become aware of what it is about each of you as individuals that impedes your working relationship.

By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of both you and your boss, you can work to create a compatible relationship which draws on each others strengths and makes up for each others weaknesses.

And another point for thought—YOU are someone else's difficult person. Oh, yes!—as perfect as we might believe we are, each of us presents a challenge to someone each and every day.

Words for Thought: Fallen Phrases

INSTRUCTIONS: Place the letters below, one in each box, to complete the phrase.

	U		T		A				O	
A		E				R	T		O	
T				P		O	B			M
	O				S	T		Y	O	
B			P	A					F	
					H					
	S	O			T			N		

F H S E R U L J M
 E Y U R E S L U R
 O I S T E O T P



Think About Yourself and the Job You Have

- ❖ What do you want from your job?
- ❖ What are your job's major goals?
- ❖ How does your boss help you achieve your goals?
- ❖ What are you rewarded for?
- ❖ What conflicts or deadlines are you under pressure from?
- ❖ What part of your job do you like most?
- ❖ What part of your job do you like least?
- ❖ Do you prefer communication in writing or face-to-face?
- ❖ Do you work better in the morning or afternoon?
- ❖ Do you like to work on one project at a time or can you deal with many irons in the fire at once?
- ❖ Are you better with details or handling the big picture?
- ❖ Do you require close supervision or do you like to work alone?
- ❖ Are you a self-starter or do you need someone to get you going?
- ❖ Do you need frequent feedback or is a periodic review enough?
- ❖ Do you face confrontation and conflict head on or do you shy away from them?
- ❖ Do you have any personality traits or quirks that others might find difficult to understand?
- ❖ What kinds of jobs do you tend to put off?



Think About Your Boss and **YOUR BOSS**

- ❖ What are your boss's major goals?
- ❖ How do you help him or her achieve these goals?
- ❖ What is your boss rewarded for?
- ❖ What kinds of pressures is your boss under?
- ❖ What part of his/her job does your boss like least?
- ❖ What part of his/her job does your boss like most?
- ❖ Does your boss prefer communication face-to-face or in writing?
- ❖ Does your boss work better in the morning or afternoon?
- ❖ Does your boss work on one project at a time or does he/she have many irons in the fire?
- ❖ Is your boss better with details or handling the big picture?
- ❖ Is your boss constantly providing guidance or supervision or does he/she expect you to work on your own?
- ❖ Does your boss face conflicts head on or does he/she shy away from confrontation?
- ❖ What kinds of jobs does your boss have a tendency to put off?



Reflections

Based on the answers to the questions concerning you and your boss's respective strengths and weaknesses, as well as your past experience, respond to the following questions:

- ❖ What kinds of projects do you and your boss work on most effectively together?
- ❖ What skills do each of you bring to those projects that make you an effective working team?
- ❖ What are your greatest areas of conflict and disagreement?
- ❖ Can you identify traits in each of you that cause this conflict or disagreement?
- ❖ What do you feel is the greatest weakness in your relationship with your boss?
- ❖ Again, can you pinpoint those traits that may contribute to this flaw in your working relationship?
- ❖ Your challenge is to develop a working relationship that fits each of your needs and styles, by building on each of your strengths and accommodating for each others' weaknesses.

SOURCE: MJI Seminar *"You and Your Boss: A Successful Team"*

The Magic Formula

The way you approach your boss will determine how he/she responds to you and sets the tone for YOUR WORKING RELATIONSHIP. Recognizing your boss's preferences, communication style, and work style really will make your interaction more productive and less stressful. Let's see if we can come up with a formula that might work.

List one thing you would like to change about your boss:

Now, decide how you will affect your boss's behavior. (Check each item that may assist in the change process.)

- _____ When your boss does this action in a manner that you like, let him/her know by vocalizing your appreciation.
EXAMPLE: "Thanks for informing me of the changes to the agenda."
- _____ Model the behavior you would like to see from your boss. If you want your boss to let you know when he/she is leaving the office, then you should model that same behavior by letting your boss know when you leave.
- _____ Explore sites on the web that have information on workplace skills. EXAMPLE: www.andreakay.com or www.monster.com
- _____ Share articles or books that address building boss/employee teams. Sharing the article with the whole staff will avoid the appearance of fingering your boss.
- _____ If you have questions—ask! If you have suggestions—voice them! Be pro-active.
- _____ Influence the work environment by having a positive attitude.
- _____ Use the words "Will you..." with your boss to communicate in a hurry and reduce stress. EXAMPLE: Instead of "you have to" use "Will you have time before you leave to sign this letter that needs to go out today?"
- _____ Meet with your boss on a regular basis (once a week). Ask: "What is coming up next week that may impact my workload?"
- _____ Use a "work-priority form" to identify completion dates. Identifying specific completion dates will help you both!

Feedback

It is important for employees to have an opportunity to provide feedback to their boss. It is also important for the boss's growth and development to hear from members of their staff about how their behavior and performance is perceived. If you had an opportunity to provide constructive feedback to your supervisor / boss, how would you answer the questions below?

SOURCE: MJI Seminar *"You and Your Boss: A Successful Team"*

MY BOSS:

1. Keeps me informed about things I need to know to do my job effectively. ___ Yes ___ No
Comments: _____

2. Makes certain that I know what is expected of me, the priorities, and what constitutes a good job. ___ Yes ___ No
Comments: _____

3. Provides me with regular feedback about my performance. ___ Yes ___ No
Comments: _____

4. Interacts with me in a manner that is respectful, responsive, courteous, and reliable. ___ Yes ___ No
Comments: _____

5. Models the kind of behavior he/she expects from his/her staff. ___ Yes ___ No
Comments: _____

6. Empowers me to do a job within the identified parameters in a way that motivates & energizes me. ___ Yes ___ No
Comments: _____

7. Could help me most by: _____

20 Ways to Motivate Your Boss



1. You don't have to like your boss, you do need to respect the position - ALWAYS!
2. If you don't like something, take the initiative to improve it .
3. Make your boss's weaknesses your strengths and offer assistance. You will be indispensable.
4. A positive attitude usually leads to positive outcomes. Focus on the positive.
5. Model the kind of behavior you would like to see in your boss and others as well.
6. Avoid surprises. You don't like to be blindsided— neither does your boss.
7. Stay informed about the important decisions confronting your boss and discreetly provide your boss with any helpful information from the front lines.
8. Don't expect your boss to be perfect—she/he is as human as you are. Accept errors graciously and the favor will be returned.
9. The 5 most serious de-motivators for any boss are employees who are: 1) Disloyal 2) Disrespectful 3) Out of control 4) Impudent 5) Undermining.
10. Never release information your boss has identified as confidential, even to your best friend.
11. Go beyond doing your job - do what needs to be done to get the task done!
12. Help your boss stay organized and on top of the needed work. If your boss looks good, you will look good as well.
13. Use discretion in interrupting your boss. Consider the timing and importance of the issue. Give your boss an out by starting with, "Is this a good time?"
14. There's a time and place to make comments or challenge your boss. Doing it in front of others will make you both look bad.
15. Ask for clarification if you if you don't understand a task - don't just set it aside.
16. Commitment to the job is more valuable than credentials.
17. Ask for a meeting with your boss if you have a concern and prepare your thoughts ahead of time.
18. Identify your boss's preference for communication (e-mail, written note, face-to-face meeting) and use it.
19. Find ways to identify task priorities so you know which task your boss wants you to accomplish first.
20. Be pro-active. Let your boss know if there is something that needs immediate attention.

Based on "1,001 Ways to Motivate Yourself and Others" by Sang H. Kim. 1998

In the Real World....



We all know this is the real world and that there are some bosses that require extraordinary care for you to be able to do your job effectively.

Let's talk about these "problem" bosses.

Burned Out

Burn-out may come from causes other than working too hard. The root of much burn-out in the courts is the onset of cynicism.

To work with this type of boss:

- Acknowledge the fact that you know how your boss is feeling about his/her job.
- Offer to help. Ask if there are responsibilities you can assume to ease the load.
- Provide leadership. If burn-out is caused by frustration, encourage a renewed focus.

Excessively Dominant

This type of boss may fail to delegate and will make all the decisions personally. This comes from the fear of losing control. You may find that this boss does not listen to others and is quick to point out failures in his/her staff.

To work with this type of boss:

- Communicate according to your boss's preferences.
- Examine any doubts you may have about your own competence. It might not be you.
- You may choose to talk to your boss about what he/she fears and about giving you more freedom to act.

Retired-in-Place Boss

Do you recognize a lack of work energy in your boss? Do you see your boss discouraging new projects and providing little direction? Does he/she come in late and leave early?

To work with this type of boss:

- Find out what interested your boss in the past.
- Encourage your boss to permit you to pursue projects that will not require much from him/her.
- Do NOT go over the boss's head to pursue a project. You will only undermine yourself.

In the Real World....

(continued)



Fearful

This boss's energy is spent on maintaining the status quo. He/she does not provide motivation to seek out new challenges because of the risk they require and often uses tradition as a shield to ward off any change.

To work with this type of boss:

- Examine the source of the fear. Is it internal or external?
- Prove your competence to your boss project by project. Discuss your successes with your boss.
- Anticipate and address the boss's fears. Do not discount them. Assure him/her that you can handle the task.

Substance Abusing

This type of boss requires more assistance than you may be able to provide.

When dealing with this type of boss:

- Make sure you document your suspicions.
- Determine the best person in the organization with whom you can discuss the problem. It may be your boss's supervisor or perhaps a person in Human Resources. Request confidentiality.

Sexual Harassing

Again, this type of boss requires special assistance.

To work with this type of boss:

- Do not wait to take action. Report the very first incident.
- Document, document, document all situations where sexual harassment has occurred.
- Identify a person in the organization with whom you can discuss the problem.

In the Real World....



(continued)

Unethical Boss

Again, this type of boss requires special assistance.

When dealing with this type of boss:

- Document each instance observed.
- Do not comply with unethical orders.
- Determine the best person in the organization with whom you can discuss this issue.
- It may be necessary to consider leaving your position.

It is the goal of every organization to maintain a professional, comfortable, and productive work environment free from bias, harassment, and any other behavior that has negative impact.

If you are experiencing behavior from your boss that is inappropriate in any way, it is necessary for you to take action.

1. Speak to your boss first about your reaction to his/her actions.
2. If the action continues and you have an Employee Handbook, refer to it for procedural advice.
3. If you have a Human Resources Division, ask for a confidential appointment to discuss the inappropriate behavior.

There are two ways
of exerting
one's strength:
one is pushing down,
the other is pulling up.

Booker T. Washington

Dear Wanda *Letters from the Workplace*

Dear Wanda:

I'm used to bosses who leave me alone but my new boss is a pain. She always wants to know what I'm doing and all of her questions slow me down.

—*Always Touching The Brakes*

Dear “Brakes”:

Maybe your boss's inquiries have more to do with her being “new” than they do with checking up on you! I'd be willing to bet that she is trying to learn more about her new environment and she is looking to you to help her understand your responsibilities in the office.

Be patient with your new boss. Allow her some time to learn. If the questions continue you may just want to mention your concerns to her in a positive way — “I'm happy to answer any questions you have but it is challenging for me to complete my work with so many interruptions. Could we find a time to sit down and talk about this at a later date?”

Dear Wanda:

I battle constantly with my boss. I'm growing weary of this. What can I do to ease the tension?

—*Ready for a Truce*

Dear “Truce”:

Solving conflicts can be challenging. Your goal should be to start a dialogue. Only by talking will you eventually reach an agreement.

You may want to start the dialogue with “I feel like our work relationship is a constant battle. Can we find a time to sit down and talk about this?”

When you do talk, use “When you.....I” statements such as -“When you don't give me a time line, I take it to mean that there is no hurry.”

Based on “*Working Wounded*” (Warner, 1998) by Bob Rosner.

Dear Wanda *Letters from the Workplace*

Dear Wanda:

I have tried talking to my boss about things that are on my mind but he never seems to listen to me. What am I doing wrong?

—*Silent in Seattle*

Dear “Silent”:

In order to get through to your boss, you need to:

1. Pick the right time - Bosses are people too and they have times when they are receptive and times when they are not. Choose the time to approach your boss when he/she is in a good mood and unhurried.
2. Figure out ahead of time precisely what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Choose your words with care.
3. Decide before you see the boss what you yourself would recommend if you were in her/his shoes. Bosses value staff who offer solutions.
4. Outline your ideas on paper and give your boss a copy—that way he/she has a written outline.
5. Listen carefully to your boss’s response. You may not get a clear answer right away. If you get a “maybe,” find a time to follow-up at a later date.

Dear Wanda:

My boss keeps piling on the work and he always wants it done yesterday! I can’t handle everything he gives me and keep my sanity too. How can I tell him it is just too much? —*Overworked & Tired*

Dear “Overworked”:

Identifying priorities is a must in the workplace. Some offices use an “office Priority Form” which is basically a sheet of paper that lists the tasks to be done and the date it needs to be done by. The work task is then prioritized based on the due date.

If you find you have multiple tasks due on the same day and it is impossible to complete all of them, take those tasks to your boss and say “There are three things that you have requested to be completed by Friday. Because of the size of the tasks, I may not be able to get all three completed. Which task should be completed first?”

The priority form can be filled out by your boss OR you can fill it out based on the information he gives you always noting a date to be completed.

Based on “*Working Wounded*” (Warner, 1998) by Bob Rosner.

People Work Effectively with Their Bosses When They...

(Use the chart below to transform the numbers into letters.)

1. Seek out information about their boss's _____ ,
_____, and _____.
2. Are _____ for opportunities to inquire about workplace issues with their boss.
3. Pay _____ to the clues revealed in their boss's behavior
4. Are _____ to the boss's work style.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

ANSWERS: 1. goals, problems, pressures. 2. alert 3. attention 4. sensitive.

Checklist for Success

There comes a time in every employee's life when there's just no getting around a talk with the boss. Maybe you need to talk about a problem coworker negotiate a leave of absence during a busy season, or ask for additional resources for your job. Whatever the topic, it's easy to be intimidated and to feel somewhat awkward in taking the initiative. The key is to plan ahead. Here is a checklist that will help you to attain success.

Checklist for Success

1) Is your boss the appropriate person? ☐Yes ☐No

WORKPLACE PERSONALITIES Difficult people seem to exist everywhere - both in and out of the workplace. If your issue is with a co-worker (other than your boss), it is appropriate for you to address the problem with that difficult person directly before going to your boss. How do you do that? Perhaps, "Mary, I feel as if we are causing each other some frustration. When would be a good time for us to talk about how we might resolve this problem? (Use lots of "we"!)" If the problem persists, then talk with your boss.

2) Is your boss open to hearing concerns/criticisms? ☐Yes ☐No

MOST BOSSES WELCOME INPUT Most people believe that if they present a concern / criticism to their boss that there will be negative repercussions and therefore they zip their lip. While it's true that there can be backlash occasionally, it is generally the exception. Most bosses - especially effective bosses—welcome constructive criticism if it is presented at a time and in a manner that is appropriate.

3) Is the time you chose appropriate? ☐Yes ☐No

DON'T SET UP AN AMBUSH! The last thing you want is for your boss to feel ambushed or criticized in public. Doing so reflects poorly on both of you. Make sure you schedule an appropriate time and place to meet that allows each of you time to prepare for the meeting and reflect on the issue at hand.

Checklist for Success

4) Is the manner in which you are planning to approach the issue respectful?

☐ Yes ☐ No

RESPECT THE POSITION You don't have to like your boss. You do need to respect the position.

Your boss will be more receptive to your input if he/she hears a request rather than a demand.

Provide only factual information, identify your concern, AND present a possible solution in a calm, conversational tone of voice.

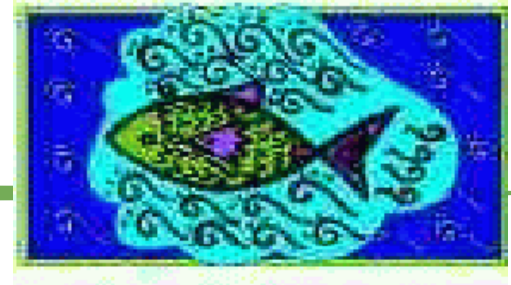
5) Is the solution you plan to present a win/win situation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

NOBODY WINS UNLESS EVERYBODY WINS The first step in identifying a solution is to find one that allows everyone involved to feel as if they gained something in the solution. It might not be everything they wanted, but it is better than it was. Don't forget your boss in this process! What will he/she gain from the solution you present?

6) Are you planning to ask for a follow-up meeting? ☐ Yes ☐ No

DON'T EXPECT AN ANSWER IMMEDIATELY Give your boss time to reflect on the issue as well as the solution you suggested. He/she may not be able to give you a definite answer right away. There may be other people who need to be consulted prior to any decision making. Before you leave the meeting, ask your boss when a good time would be to follow-up.

Story of the “Koi”



This is the story of the Japanese carp, otherwise known as the Koi. A Koi is known for its seemingly unlimited potential for growth. Out in its natural habitat, a Koi has been known to grow as large as three feet in length. If, however, you put a Koi in a small fish bowl, it will only grow to be two or three inches long.

That's the way it works with people as well. Our emotional and mental growth is proportionate to the size of our world. If we contain ourselves in small ways, our emotional and mental growth is stifled. If we create a work space that is positive, nurturing and fosters new opportunities, our potential for growth is unlimited.

Each of us needs to take ownership in creating the space in our world. We need to exercise our initiative in fostering positive relationships, including the relationship we have with our boss. Be pro-active - especially if you are unhappy with your present situation - and take the initiative to improve it.

BASED ON: “*Expand Your Career By Expanding Your Mind*” by Harvey Mackay, Employment Times, July 24, 2001
www.employmenttimes.com

Additional Resources

- ❖ CAREER CENTER: www.monster.com
- ❖ MANAGEMENT LIBRARY: www.mgmtlibrary.com
- ❖ EMPLOYMENT TIMES: <http://www.employmenttimes.com>
- ❖ PERFORMANCE TRAINING CORPORATION: www.ptcteam.com
- ❖ MARTINDALE & ASSOCIATES: www.bobmartindale.com
- ❖ SEEKING SUCCESS: www.seekingsuccess.com
- ❖ I HATE FILING! CLUB: www.ihatefiling.com
- ❖ iVILLAGE: www.ivillage.com
- ❖ SMARTBIZ: www.smartbiz.com
- ❖ FAST COMPANY: www.fastcompany.com
- ❖ CAREER BUILDER: www.careerbuilder.com
- ❖ HOUSTON CHRONICLE: www.houston.webpoint.com
- ❖ EMERGIT: www.emergit.com
- ❖ LEADERS DIRECT: www.leadersdirect.com
- ❖ WORKOPOLIS: www.workopolis.com